IMPERIAL LESSONS FROM ATHENS AND SPARTA: EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH HISTORIES OF ANCIENT GREECE

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Abstract: The only perspective through which eighteenth-century British histories of Ancient Greece have been studied is their attitude towards monarchy and democracy. Because these texts collectively depicted monarchy as the ideal type of government and democracy as the worst, scholars have labelled them simply as pro-Spartan and anti-Athenian. Nevertheless, ancient history-writing was then a practice aiming at providing insights into as many contemporary political topics as possible and Ancient Greek history-writing was no exception. The question of empire appears to be a problem that equally preoccupied the historians. In that sense, the eighteenth-century British histories of Ancient Greece serve as an alternative source for arriving at the contemporary understanding of empire in Britain. Furthermore, the tone of the historians' arguments, which was very much determined by the theme selected, was far from always pro-Spartan. Within the context of empire, Athens was presented as the model to be emulated.

Introduction

The writing of Ancient Greek history in eighteenth-century Britain has not, except for a few scattered treatments, received much attention from historians owing to the poor quality of scholarship that these texts contain when compared to the masterly level attained in the following century by George Grote and Connop Thirlwall. Also, because contemporary English and Roman histories, such as Hume's *History of England* and obviously Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, enjoyed more fame and success than the histories of Ancient Greece, studies of eighteenth-century British historiography have considered them to represent a discipline not yet fully formed. Nevertheless, the work of eighteenth-century British historians on Ancient Greek history has not gone completely unnoticed and has been briefly assessed in chapters, or parts of chapters, and in books devoted to larger topics such as historiography and neo-classicism.[3] Additionally,

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[3] M.L. Clarke, *Greek Studies in England 1700–1830* (Cambridge, 1945); J.W. Johnson, *The Formation of English Neo-Classical Thought* (Princeton, NJ, 1967); and R.M. Ogilvie, *Latin and Greek: A History of the Influence of the Classics on English Life from 1600 to 1918* (London, 1964). Also see A. Momigliano, *Ottavo Contributo Alla Storia Degli Studi Classici e del Mondo Antico* (Rome, 1987).

there are a few articles that have shown a limited interest in some of these texts, but these have done no more than help perpetuate the conviction that the texts contain only pro-Spartan arguments to defend and uphold a monarchical system of government.[4]

Existing analyses of these histories have been confined to this single vantage point, namely that the historians favoured Sparta on the grounds of its being a monarchy and employed the examples of Athens to exhibit the evils of democracy. Nevertheless, grounded in the belief that ancient history offered universal rules for establishing balance and enduring order under varying political circumstances, these histories of Ancient Greece cover a wide range of topics, from party politics to elections, from ideal governance to the conduct of empire. Rather than always favouring Sparta over Athens, the assessment changes according to the topic selected. Therefore it is not appropriate to concentrate on only a single aspect of these histories and to classify them as simply pro-monarchical and therefore pro-Spartan. This study seeks to show that when eighteenth-century historians of Britain turned to the topic of empire, it was Athens, not Sparta that came to the fore as a model for the British political nation to emulate.

The eighteenth century in Britain witnessed a great increase in the number of histories of Ancient Greece and Rome, since the neo-classicism of this period drew its utmost inspiration from the common belief in its own utility for better analysing and understanding the British past and present by means of ancient examples. As James William Johnson asserts: 'Neo-classicism was thoroughly empirical. And it was unashamedly utilitarian.'[5] This belief in the utility of ancient history was based on the supposed completeness and general applicability of an ancient world within which one could have a comprehensive picture of events; including all causes and effects, major and minor. It was believed that antiquity depicted a kind of dynamic cycle, through which civilizations rose and fell. It was first the states of antiquity that experienced this cycle of 'birth, growth, maturation, decline and death', but all nations were subject to it. They would follow the same historical patterns and inevitably meet the same end, which was irrecoverable degeneration.

For British statesmen and those who wrote for them, one of the ways to prevent or at least delay this degeneration and to preserve stability was the meticulous examination of ancient history. Ancient history was seen as full of political lessons and would teach the nation to follow the footsteps of the

[4] P. Cartledge, 'Ancient Greeks and Modern Britons', *History Today*, 44 (1994), pp. 286–317; K. Demetriou, 'In Defence of the British Constitution: Theoretical Implications of the Debate over Athenian Democracy in Britain, 1770–1850', *History of Political Thought*, XVII (1996), pp. 280–97; and A.W. Saxonhouse, 'Athenian Democracy: Modern Mythmakers and Ancient Theorists', *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 26 (1993), pp. 486–90.

[5] J.W. Johnson, 'What was Neo-Classicism?', *Journal of British Studies*, 9 (1969), pp. 49–70, p. 52.

ancients to greatness and to avoid the mistakes that caused their fall. If histories of Rome were more common and more prominent, these motivations applied no less to the writing of Ancient Greek history. As Eric Nelson argues, the legacy of Ancient Greece had exercised a considerable influence on republican thought in England since as early as the sixteenth century.[6] When the search for answers from antiquity to the question of empire became fashionable in the eighteenth century on the other hand, it was primarily to Roman history that writers turned. Still, Ancient Greece served as an important supplementary source for the attempts by the British to model ideals of empire.

Although the texts about Ancient Greek history, written and read in eighteenth-century Britain, when judged by current criteria, contain insufficient, sometimes inaccurate historical information, they nonetheless provide useful insight into how some topical political issues were discussed, including not only the question of forms of government but also the question of empire. Having projected the Ancient Greek experience onto political challenges also troubling contemporary British statesmen, the historians aimed at fulfilling their share of the duty to guide the political nation through turbulent times.

The interdependence of history and politics in the eighteenth century is well established. As Lord Bolingbroke stated in his *arte historica*, history was meant to teach the reader 'a general system of ethics and politics on the surest foundations, on the trial of these principals and rules in all ages, and on the confirmation of them by universal experience'.[7] No eighteenth-century historical work, in this sense, was free of politics. Not uncommonly, the historical truth was somewhat twisted or overstated in order to fit it into one or more ongoing political debates so as to underpin the argument of one side of the debates. In spite of the increasing interest in archaeological findings through which the ancient past could be reconstructed as it really was, Ancient Greek history-writing of the eighteenth century should be evaluated against this rather elastic political background.

The Greek states were understood and introduced as tools to transmit certain political messages to the British reader. In contrast to the question of forms of government, with reference to the notion of empire Athens stood for the quintessential example of the ideal. In history-writing in general the ideal, though derived from the same historical sources, varied according to the political views of the historians. In terms of writing Ancient Greek history, the ideals of the historians did not vary much, because almost all the texts considered here reflected, either explicitly or implicitly, a Tory viewpoint.

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[6] E. Nelson, *The Greek Tradition in Republican Thought* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 17.

[7] St John Henry Bolingbroke, *Letters on the Study and Use of History* (a new edition) (London, 1779), p. 53.

The eighteenth century was a time when, as Kathleen Wilson argues, the 'empire mattered', even 'to ordinary people'.[8] It would be wrong to suggest that British statesmen had not already begun to seek for an ideal imperial governance prior to and concurrently with the publication of these history texts. What the British historians did was to contribute to this quest for ideal imperial governance by favouring the Athenian model. Sparta, on the other hand, was assessed in the same light as the undesirable models of empires of the eighteenth-century, namely France and Spain. David Armitage contends that the British empire

> deploys resources from a wider tradition of political thought, stretching back to classical sources in Ancient Greece and, especially, Rome, but also encompassing contemporary Spain and the United Provinces, as a part of a wider European dialogue within which the various empires were defined and defended.[9]

I would argue that Ancient Greek history was accepted, though not as predominantly as the history of Rome, as a viable source for the eighteenth-century quest for an ideal empire. It was employed to comprehend not only discussion of the empire of Britain, but also of the empires of other European states. In my framework, however, I would replace 'the United Provinces' with 'France' in the above statement of Armitage and add 'contested' to 'defended'.

Historians

The Ancient Greek historiography of eighteenth-century Britain has been neglected to the degree that none of the existing works mentioned so far provides anything like a complete list of these history texts. In addition, the analyses which have focused only on the texts' monarchical tone, somewhat monotonously refer to and reiterate the same words of the same historians, John Gillies and William Mitford. The works of Gillies and Mitford are the most renowned examples of the genre, but definitely not the only ones. Hence I would like to take into consideration a more complete list, including works by two Irish historians which were also read in Britain, and which might be considered here to fall into the same category of 'British historians'. Chronologically first are the works of John Potter (1673/4–1747), afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury, and the rather obscure Thomas Hind. At a time when Greek history was not yet a matter of general interest, Potter's book, *Archaeologia Graeca* (1697) was received with considerable enthusiasm, whereas Hind managed only to have the first volume of his *History of Greece*

[8] K. Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London and New York, 2003), p. 15.

[9] D. Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 5.

(1707) published. All Greek histories that appeared subsequent to Potter's history in some way aimed at superseding his work and developing the parts left unclear by him.[10]

Concurrent with Hind, Temple Stanyan (1676/7–1752), who was the first Englishman to write a complete history of Ancient Greece in the eighteenth century, published his *Grecian History* in 1707. The second edition of this work in 1739 appeared to be the forerunner of many subsequent Greek histories published in the second half of the century. Until the arrival of the histories by Gillies and Mitford, Stanyan dominated the field, despite his shortcomings in terms of methodology. Although this history has been frequently labelled 'pro-Spartan', because its author, in an unhidden dislike of democracy, argued against Athens, he equally distanced himself from Sparta as 'too limited' a monarchy.[11] However, when it came to lessons on managing an empire, as discussed further below, Stanyan derived them mostly from Athens. Before the publication of other general history texts, a particular history drawn from Ancient Greece, *The History of the Life and Reign of Philip, King of Macedon*, was published by the Irish clergyman and historian Thomas Leland (1722–85) in 1758. Leland's concluding remark on Philip of Macedon, '[i]f he was unjust, he was like Caesar, unjust for the sake of empire',[12] ended up as one of the most cited and controversial quotations in those years. Leland's *Philip* also reflected a highly positive view of Athens.

Returning to more general histories, the Greek history of Oliver Goldsmith, whose Roman and English histories actually became more popular, was published posthumously in 1785. His *Grecian History* was also abridged for the use of schools in 1787. Nevertheless, despite his wide audience, charming style and claim to offer a better Greek history, Goldsmith's attempts at writing histories, including this one, only gained him a justified reputation as a great hack-writer.[13] Goldsmith's history was overshadowed by that of William Mitford (1744–1827), which was the most monarchical and Tory-oriented history yet published. In fact, the notable success of Mitford's five-volume history was alone responsible for the labelling of eighteenth-century Ancient Greek historiography as anti-Athenian and pro-monarchical. Apart from the first volume published in 1784, Mitford's Greek history was preoccupied with the French Revolution. It attempted to associate the events of Ancient

[10] T. Hind, *The History of Greece* (London, 1707), Preface; W. Mitford, *The History of Greece* (London, 1784), I, p. 253; T. Stanyan, *The Grecian History: From the Original of Greece, to the Death of Philip of Macedon* (London, 1766), II, Preface; also R. Jackson, *Literatura Graeca* (London, 1769), p. vii.

[11] Stanyan, *Grecian History*, II, Preface.

[12] T. Leland, *The History of the Life and Reign of Philip King of Macedonia, the Father of Alexander* (London, 1758), I, p. xvii.

[13] As is known to many, Goldsmith's *History of England* was hacked from David Hume's *History of England* and *The Present State of the British Empire* from William Burke's *Account of the European Settlements in America.*

Athens with those of eighteenth-century France. By citing examples from Athens, Mitford condemned democracy as a curse to moral government, as also seen in revolutionary France, and enthusiastically idealized Sparta at the expense of Athens. Thus, having become entangled with exhibiting the evils of democracy, he sacrificed his ideal of writing good history and desire of 'avoiding equally negligence and tediousness'.[14] On these grounds, I shall only take into consideration the first volume of this work.

Two years after the appearance of the first volume of Mitford's work, John Gillies (1714–1836), later the Royal Historiographer for Scotland, succeeding William Robertson in this post, published his Greek history in two volumes in 1786. In his own words, Gillies sought to write a 'perpetual unbroken narrative' that would 'promote the great purposes of pleasure and utility'.[15] Similar to Mitford, Gillies too brought his political concerns into his history and transmitted his message in the form of an anti-Athenian argument. However, in his quest for ideal empire-building, his messages became significantly pro-Athenian. The last Greek history of the era came from an Irish historian John Gast (b. 1715) who was then the Archdeacon of Glendalough. This work was actually a new version of his previously published *Rudiments of Grecian History* (1753), which was written in the uncommon form of a dialogue. Despite his efforts, Gast could not compete with the reputation of Mitford and Gillies, and his history remained largely neglected even in his lifetime.

It was not only to the above authors that Ancient Greek history appealed. Others in the eighteenth century saw the relevance of this considerable source of data for contemporary political topics. Walter Moyle (1672–1721) and E.W. Montagu (1713–76), for instance, produced texts that included partial accounts of Ancient Greek history.[16] Moyle, a Whig politician, published a long essay in praise of the virtues of Sparta, in terms of its excellent legal practices as an empire, achieving 'balance in property, power and dominion'.[17] Montagu, on the other hand, the son of Wortley Montagu and a Whig at least by upbringing, purportedly wrote a pamphlet with the aim of proving the resemblance between contemporary Britain and the free republics of antiquity. In this venture, Athens was much commended as 'a strong contrast' to Sparta, though here the focus was more on political system than on empire.[18] These two authors, however, did not intend to assume the task of writing a more

[14] Mitford, *History of Greece*, I, Preface.

[15] J. Gillies, *The History of Ancient Greece, Its Colonies and Conquests from the Earliest Accounts till the Division of the Macedonia Empire in East* (London, 1786), I, p. vi.

[16] See also Sir William Young, *The Spirit of Athens* (London, 1777).

[17] W. Moyle, 'An Essay on the Lacedemonian Government' (1698), in *The Whole Works of Walter Moyle that were Published by Himself* (London, 1727), p. 50.

[18] E.W. Montagu, *Reflections on the Rise and Fall of the Ancient Republics* (London, 1759), p. 74.

complete and better history than the existing ones, but rather, in Montagu's words, sought 'to examine the evidence arising from ancient history'.[19] In this study, therefore, the multiple-volume works explicitly intended as histories will be the principal focus.

These British historians were collectively concerned with the topic of empire along with other political issues, particularly with the best ways to build and preserve an empire. Although, excepting Mitford, they did not exhibit an explicit commitment to a Tory standpoint, they presented two kinds of empire, one desirable and the other undesirable, in a fashion greatly resembling Tory political discourse on contemporary imperial affairs. Just as the Tories opposed the constant engagement in a land war, the historians critically approached the military attitude of a Spartan empire that insatiably sought new opportunities for war on land. Also, the historians' appreciation of the commercial maritime empire of Athens was in harmony with a Tory understanding of an empire that was to be preserved and furthered through the implementation of a 'Blue Water' strategy.

The publication of some of these texts may not coincide with the days when Tory opposition ideas were most fervently expressed. Nevertheless, these views evolved through a long period of time before they were fully formulated and they endured as political traditions long after they had been overtaken by other items on the immediate political agenda. While treating the topic of empire, in addition to the contemporary Tory political tradition, the historians also turned to certain notions that deeply concerned the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment. These historians were not solely involved in party discourse, but rather a blend of parliamentary politics with extra-parliamentary discussions of the 'ideal' through reflections on politics, society and civilization. In this sense, the historians joined the discussion over empire with reference to the contemporary problematic of commercial versus military means in their works. Parallel to the emphasis on the virtue of commerce in the quest for the advancement of nations by the thinkers of Scottish Enlightenment, the historians, having despised the militaristic attitude of the Spartan empire, presented the commercial activities of the Athenian empire as the correct practice to be adopted by the British in their imperial venture.

The notion of balance of power also resonated in the texts of ancient Greek history.[20] However, in essence the aim in elaborating this concept was not to agree with the Whig standpoint. The idea of the balance of power was rather approached through an emphasis on the fact that Ancient Greece consisted of similarly formed and governed states and therefore resembled a civilization not inherently different from modern Europe. The idealized version of Greece

[19] *Ibid*., p. 5.

[20] See Gast, *History of Greece*, II, p. 568; Leland, *Life and Reign of Philip*, I, p. xxxviii; and Moyle, 'Lacedemonian Government', p. 51.

depicted a 'really united body, happy in itself and formidable to its enemies'.[21] The secret of this Greek solidarity was seemingly embedded in the balance of power preserved among the major Greek states. The historians' therefore stressed the innate similarity of these states which would facilitate the balance, rather than the differences which would destroy it. All in all, Ancient Greece as a whole represented to the eighteenth century a civilization of high refinement and reflected the way the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment understood modern Europe.

Ancient Greece as Europe

Having unequivocally recommended the subject of their histories to the political nation, the historians implied that Ancient Greece resembled contemporary Europe in many ways. Therefore, the former's history was apt as a guide to the eighteenth-century British audience in their attempts to understand the European civilization to which they belonged, their relationship with other European states, as well as lessons about empire. Ancient Greece promoted the spirit of liberty, the stand against despotism, a single civilization shared by similarly sovereign states, and of course the rules for preserving the balance of power among these states. Uniquely gifted with the spirit of liberty, the Ancient Greeks gloriously stood up against any attempts, both internal and external, to impose despotism, particularly those of the Persian kings, and remained immune to all 'the inflexible rigour of despotism'.[22] The first and foremost reason why the Ancient Greeks had never known despotic government and remained free was given as the existence of the Amphictyonic Council.[23] In the eyes of the historians, the Greeks thus distinguished themselves from the eastern nations, at least until their surrender to the Ottomans. With the exception of Mitford's association of Athens with Ottoman despotism in the volumes of his history published subsequent to the French Revolution, the Ancient Greek histories of eighteenth-century Britain generally highlighted the non-despotic character of the Greek states as one of the pillars on which Greek civilization rose to refinement. That the political and property rights of Greek citizens were enshrined in justly designed legal codes was particularly praiseworthy.

Despite their rivalry for supremacy, the petty states of ancient Greece always maintained similar understandings of civic rights as different cultivators of one and the same civilization. In this way, Ancient Greece reflected the way Europe was contemporarily perceived by the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment in their theories of civilization and progress. To them, Europe consisted of similarly sovereign states in which individuality and liberty

[21] Leland, *Life and Reign of Philip*, I, p.xxxvii.
[22] Gillies, *History of Ancient Greece*, I, p. 11, n. 35.
[23] J. Gast, *The History of Greece* (Dublin, 1793), I, p. 45.

could flourish. Despite their differences, the states of Europe, as Adam Ferguson contended in his *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, constituted a 'happy system of policy' which 'does honour to mankind'.[24] The historian Leland's approach to the Greek empire was noteworthy in this sense. While pointing out the varying characteristics of the Greek states, he also underlined the essential common feature that separated them from the barbarians dwelling beyond their eastern border, 'an ardour for liberty, and a strict regard to the public good'.[25] The neighbouring Greek states developed the sense of belonging to a wider community than their own, since they stood 'all united and connected together by interest and affection'. What emerged from this common affiliation was, as Leland maintained, 'a similar species of civility' solidly committed to the Greek laws and commonwealth.[26] Thus was built the parallel between Ancient Greece and contemporary Europe and so was proven the suitability of Ancient Greek history as a guidebook that pinpointed and magnified those experiences that coincided with the affairs of contemporary Europe. This affinity also indicated the viability of studying the Greek states individually, in addition to collectively, so as to enlighten the British reader on varying political topics.

Empire: Commercial versus Militaristic

To Gast, Ancient Greece acted as 'a moral governor over human things'. Under such rule 'a people, in their beginnings mean and inconsiderable, advanced by virtue and wisdom to the greatest height of empire'.[27] Clearly, sharing the same civilization would not necessarily indicate that the states representing the Greek examples of empire peacefully coexisted without any major clash, nor that they unanimously agreed to implement identical policies. On the issue of empire, the Greek states, especially Sparta and Athens, of particular interest to this study, pursued contradictory designs. Within this context, with its modest scale, an emancipating legal structure, non-military means of empire-building such as widespread commerce, and finally its naval strength, the Athenian empire, except under Pericles, seemed to bear undeniable similarities to the commonly held British view of an ideal empire in the eighteenth century. As an antithesis of this ideal, the imperial practice of

[24] A. Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (Dublin, 1767), p. 198. Also see W. Robertson, *History of the Reign of Charles the Fifth* (London, 1856), I, pp. 15–16.

[25] Leland, *Life and Reign of Philip*, I, p. xxxv.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. xxxvii. Also, Goldsmith emphasized that the Greek states, 'though seemingly different', shared 'one common language, one religion and a national pride'. O. Goldsmith, *The Grecian History from the Earliest State to the Death of Alexander Great* (London, 1785), I, p. 9.

[27] J. Gast, *The Rudiments of the Grecian History from the First Establishment of the States of Greece to the Overthrow of their Liberties in the Days of Philip the Macedonian* (Dublin, 1753), Preface.

Sparta, on the other hand, was grounded in belligerent policies aiming at an unwise territorial expansionism. In that sense, Sparta appears in our texts as the chief model of an undesirable kind of empire, equivalent to the contemporary Spanish and French empires. On the matter of empire, the accomplishments of Athens overshadowed those of Sparta. According to the generally held eighteenth-century British view, Spain and France, along with their aggressive policies pursued at the expense of 'the general tranquillity of Europe',[28] carried out unwise imperial designs beyond Europe. These designs rendered them undesirable models of empire for the British political nation.

The unpleasant consequences of the Spanish imperial venture were widely asserted and the general conviction was that the Spanish overseas enterprise, initiated supposedly to enrich the motherland, had in fact exhausted its financial and human resources. As one anonymous pamphlet suggested, Spain failed to transform its imperial assets into a profitable investment, as its governors '[i]nstead of considering the *West Indies* as an estate they were to improve and receive an annual profit always from', hastily 'squandered' this vast territory. Regarding the rise and fall of the Spanish empire, the British saw repeated the lesson drawn from empires that had fallen previously. In order to reduce the cost and sustain the profitability of imperial designs, the motherland ought delicately to attach the colonies to itself through the civilizing and mutually enriching ties of commerce. According to the same pamphlet:

> [i]f the *Spaniards*, as soon as they had acquired such extensive dominion in the new world, had diligently applied to the cultivation of trade and manufacture, it would necessarily have given them the supreme direction of the affairs of *Europe*.[29]

France, on the other hand, which seemed to share the same 'spirit of industry and enterprise'[30] as Britain, was not completely ignorant of the crucial role to be played by commerce in the proper growth of empires. The French empire was 'commercial' in character.[31] Nevertheless, the overseas rise of France followed an aggressive pattern of expansion and menaced Britain both in North America and Europe. Due to its authoritarian and warlike policies, the Bourbon scheme of empire was a lesson for the British that they 'ought to use every method to repress them [the French] to prevent them from extending their territories, their trade or their influence'.[32] The French transferred to

[28] D. Hume, 'Of the Balance of Power', in *Essays Moral, Political and Literary in Two Volumes*, ed. T.H. Green and T.H. Grose (London, 1882), I, p. 354.

[29] *A Description of the Spanish Islands and Settlements on the Coast of the West Indies, compiled from Authentic Memoirs* (London, 2nd edn., 1774), pp. xvii–xviii.

[30] W. Burke, *An Account of the European Settlements in America in Two Volumes* (London, 1757), II, p. 16.

[31] D. Hancock, ' "World of Business to Do": William Freeman and the Foundation of England's Commercial Empire', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 57 (2000), pp. 3–34, p. 4.

[32] Burke, *Account of the European Settlements*, p. 287.

their military designs all the revenue generated from trade with their colonies, building an empire aggressively but exhausting its profits.

Emphasizing the same points that contemporary political pamphlets stressed as the features of undesirable models of empire in the shape of Spain and France, the British historians of Ancient Greece demonstrated to their readers how the Spartan imperial enterprise had brought territorial gains but had failed to endure. Therefore, the Spartan example did not represent a viable option for the process of empire-building. Antiquity suggested that an empire that overstretched its territory and that chased incessantly after the prospects of war would not last. Spain and France were the reflections of this political lesson on the eighteenth century. The Athenian experience, on the other hand, encompassed all the right features for the acquisition of imperial greatness and the historians presented it as a template to be applied in all times. In its pursuit of empire by non-military methods, ruling out conquest from the enterprise, the ever-growing British empire flourished through widespread commerce and thus seemed to be proceeding on the right track that had once been taken by Athens and had proven a success.

In his *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor points to the existence of a 'battle between two ethical outlooks' in eighteenth-century Britain. The outcome of this battle transpired in the form of 'the rise of new valuation of [the] commercial life' and 'the recession of the aristocratic honour ethic, which stressed glory won in military pursuits'.[33] In agreement with this argument, I would further propose that one of the fields on which this battle between militaristic and commercial attitudes in the culture was fought appeared to be the histories of Ancient Greece. The former was represented by Sparta, the latter by Athens. The glory of Sparta seemed to be much tainted by its oppressive politics, which became more visible in imperial questions. With liberty enshrined in its legal code, its naval superiority, its excellence in commerce and its unwarlike character, the imperial experience of Athens received positive remarks of the sort that Sparta never did. The cause of this unbridgeable difference between the empires of Sparta and Athens was, according to the historians, the contrasting characters of their legal systems.

As the eighteenth-century histories of Ancient Greece unfolded, one inclination common to all the historians seems to have been their stress on the idea that the inherent characteristics of the legal code of a state determined the features of its imperial policy. As J.C.D. Clark has pointed out, 'law, not party politics, was the synthesizing intellectual *genre* of the late-eighteenth century constitution'.[34] The publication of the majority of the Ancient Greek histories coincided with this shift to an appeal to law as the science of government. The

[33] C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA, 1989), p. 285.

[34] J.C.D. Clark, 'A General Theory of Party, Opposition and Government', *The Historical Journal*, 23 (1980), pp. 295–325, p. 303.

particular reference to legal history by the philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment resulted in the conviction that the history and political character of a state could be understood through its legislation. The flaws in the politics of a state could be explained by 'the disparate and contradictory elements in its legal system'.[35] The stimulation of this understanding of law in the second half of the eighteenth century inevitably made its way to these history texts. Specifically, in contemporary theories of civilization and progress, a well-established and just legal system was viewed as essential for refinement, civilization and commerce.[36] Otherwise authoritarianism, aggression and, as the worst possible outcome, a despotic state with oppressive imperial policies would result.

On account of this argument, the historians asserted that the defective character of the Spartan empire owed a great deal to the legal code of Lycurgos, and thus underlined the effect of the legislative tradition at home on the empire in the making. Within this context, Sparta came to the fore as the Greek state with the most authoritarian laws that hardened not only its citizens but also its attitude towards its colonies and neighbouring states. Undoubtedly, Lycurgos himself received remarks of approval from the historians. Among them, Goldsmith, who considered Lycurgos as 'one of the first and most extraordinary legislators that ever appeared among mankind',[37] gave him the most credit. From the perspective of empire, however, the legal code of Lycurgos was not depicted in the histories as something to be emulated. Lycurgos first encountered the problem of internal security and then resolved to enhance Spartan government through laws and institutions whose 'severity', according to Leland, first transformed the Spartan people 'into a robust, hardy valiant nation, made for war'. But then, this warlike spirit of the Spartans 'under the appearance of a rigid discipline', inspired 'vast designs of power' and fuelled 'an inordinate and violent ambition'.[38] Such were the hallmarks of the Spartan understanding of empire.

Throughout the eighteenth century, the threat of ever-growing Bourbon strength disturbed 'both ministers and the political nation in general', making them worry not only 'about the strength and intentions of other powers' but also 'about British vulnerability in face of them'.[39] In this respect, the way the British historians understood the imperial growth of Sparta by means of its

[35] D. Lieberman, 'The Legal Needs of a Commercial Society: The Jurisprudence of Lord Kames', in *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. I. Hont and M. Ignatieff (Cambridge, 1983), p. 209.

[36] See Hume, 'That Politics may be Reduced to a Science', in *Essays*, I, p. 105.

[37] Goldsmith, *Grecian History*, I, p. 15. Also Stanyan, *Grecian History*, I, p. 85; Hind, *History of Greece*, pp. 99–100; and Gast, *Rudiments*, p. 243.

[38] Leland, *Life and Reign of Philip*, I, p. 22. Also Gillies, *History of Ancient Greece*, I, p. 89.

[39] J. Black, *A System of Ambition? British Foreign Policy 1660–1793* (London and New York, 1991), p. 74.

aggressive and expansionist policies resembled considerably eighteenth-century apprehension of the French desire to challenge Britain both at home and in North America. A military character was a feature never attributed to Athens specifically within the context of imperial affairs. The Spartans, on the other hand, were in Stanyan's words 'the only people in the world, to whom war gave repose'. For them 'the glory . . . was to be gained by dint of fighting and in the open field'. Their 'strict discipline', acquired through Lycurgos's code of laws, bestowed on the Spartans a 'moroseness of temper', and they extended to their colonies as well as to the neighbouring Greek states 'the same harsh severity'.[40] Additionally, in resemblance to how Spain and, above all, France harassed the states of modern Europe in the name of building a universal monarchy, Sparta sought expansionism at the expense of its neighbours. Gast, who wrote most straightforwardly on the issue of empire, maintained that the Spartans' 'very virtues were the ruin of their unhappy neighbours'.[41]

Needless to say, a constant quest for the military solution, in particular by war on land, was not a policy held in high esteem in eighteenth-century Britain among those of a Tory frame of mind. First, this was the French way of conducting foreign affairs and second, giving priority to 'naval power and colonial and commercial considerations'[42] was seen as more feasible. The 'interventionist foreign policy', likened to that of France, pursued during the Whig supremacy, very much disturbed Tories and such discontent inevitably echoed in the contemporary texts of Ancient Greek history which reflected a Tory tendency. In this respect, despite being seen by the historians as the archetype of monarchy in the Greek world, Sparta represented an undesirable model for empire because of its unfailingly belligerent imperial policies.

According to the historians, if it was the belligerent character of the Spartans that determined their aggressive imperial policies, the Athenian spirit of liberty shaped the Athenian way of empire. Liberty was granted to the Athenians through their legal system. The Athenian empire evolved in a beneficial and praiseworthy way due to the legal code introduced by Solon.[43] The first Athenian attempts at colonization could be traced back to 600BC, which coincided with the age of Solon. Having reinforced reforms of an unprecedentedly broad scope covering almost all areas, Solon put an end, in the words of Goldsmith, to 'the inactive government' of the times of the kings which lacked 'the spirit of extensive dominion'.[44] The historians called the reader's attention to this point and argued that it was Solon's comprehensive legislation that

[40] Stanyan, *Grecian History*, I, pp. 87–8. Also Gast, *Rudiments*, p. 266.

[41] Gast, *Rudiments*, p. 266.

[42] Black, *System of Ambition*, p. 85.

[43] Gillies, *History of Ancient Greece*, I, pp. 265, 453 and 455; and Jackson, *Literature Graeca*, p. 39.

[44] Goldsmith, *Grecian History*, I, p. 43.

brought about wealth, greatness and eventually imperial success. Through complete legislation, similar to that launched by Solon, a state would definitely attain polished manners, profitable commerce, self-sufficient agricultural production, security and wealth.[45]

Given the fact that the kind of legislation determined not only the type of government, but the characteristics of the imperial policy of a state, Gillies argued that, although conquest by definition had always to cause pain to the conquered, the lands controlled by authoritarian Sparta 'suffered still greater vexations under the Spartan, than they had done under the Athenian empire'.[46] In acquiring new territories, the Spartans did not give priority to the welfare of their colonies and remained fully committed to expanding their empire.[47] The ideal of mutual benefit between motherland and colonies was a concept newly established in eighteenth-century Britain and was promoted in some pamphlets as a wise policy for empire.[48] Sparta was the type of empire that disregarded such an ideal and gained the loyalty of subordinate states and colonies through a scheme of oppression, 'far from intending any benefit by it'[49] to them. Sparta, on this account, remained unattractive to the British historians in their search for a more refined policy of empire, grounded in the principle of mutuality.

Obviously, oppressive imperial policies required continual military action. Given the contemporary dislike of engagement in a constant war on land, significantly in the Tory camp, the Spartan empire appeared to be at odds with the British understanding of empire, which was mainly mercantile, not militaristic. In order to sustain the durability of their empire, the Spartans always had to chase after 'fresh occasions of war',[50] which stood as the ultimate source of their imperial power. All in all, they maintained an atmosphere of terror throughout their empire. The Spartans, apparently no different from the Spanish and the French, were simply the most despicable sort of conquerors 'who wield the sword, not of *justice* but of *violence* and *oppression*'.[51] They created a false solidarity which was destined to end as soon as the motherland ceased to be formidable.

Conversely, Athens was viewed as qualified to teach imperial lessons. By means of widespread commerce, naval power and polite manners, Athens

[45] Mitford, *History of Greece*, I, p. 251; Gast, *History of Greece*, I, p. 257. Stanyan is the only historian disagreeing with the superiority of Solon's laws over those of Lycurgos. Stanyan, *Grecian History*, I, p. 181.

[46] Gillies, *History of Greece*, I, p. 398.

[47] Gast, *History of Greece*, I, p. 398.

[48] W. Baron, *History of the Colonisation of the Free States of Antiquity applied to the Present Contest between Great Britain and her American Colonies with Reflections* (London, 1777); T. Pownall, *The Administration of the Colonies* (London, 1765).

[49] Gast, *History of Greece*, I, p. 494.

[50] Goldsmith, *Grecian History*, I, p. 334.

[51] Gast, *Rudiments*, p. 266. Italics in original.

won the loyalty of its colonies and ensured that this attachment would be an enduring one. The Athenian rulers safeguarded the prosperity and welfare of 'all confederates'.[52] In this way, Athens built a very profitable imperial network that worked to mutual benefit. While Athens rejoiced at the flow of wealth, as a result of sustained commerce with the colonies and neighbouring states, and with the sense of security brought by dominance over Sparta and Persia, the colonies and subordinate Greek states, in return, benefited not only from trade with the motherland but also from the superior techniques introduced by the Athenians to increase the efficiency of production, as well as from the peace their alliance with Athens provided. Evidently, such an understanding of empire dovetailed with how many in the British political nation perceived their own empire.

Among the imperial features of Athens which appeared to resemble those of Britain most, naval superiority was of particular interest to the British reader. The ideal of a maritime commercial empire and Britain's suitability to become one, preoccupied the political nation for centuries. According to the perennial belief that supposedly originated in Ancient Rome, Britain by virtue of being an island had a unique status. It was commonly pictured by its inhabitants as isolated from the continent and eventually seemed in a position to excel at maritime activities in order to maintain or surpass that isolation. One can detect the varying reflections of this belief on British imperial policies in different ages. In the sixteenth century, isolation was thought to be the reason why the kingdom did not possess any overseas territories.[53] In the eighteenth century, however, the Tories made great play on this isolation as a part of their propaganda against the Whig engagement in continental affairs at the expense of maritime advancement. Investment in naval policies then appeared to be a natural outcome of the isolated situation of Britain. The idea of a maritime *imperium*, which had once stood for the sovereignty 'solely over home waters', grew into something larger to include the 'conception of *mare liberum* on the oceans', which led in turn to the advocacy of the blue-water strategy of the eighteenth century.[54]

Looking at this picture, the traditional British notion of maritime dominion accorded with the Athenian superiority on the seas, which was shared with no other Ancient Greek state. In terms of security, for instance, the histories established that Athenian maritime superiority eliminated the possibility of invasion by sea altogether.[55] Similarly, in imperial affairs, the benefits brought by a powerful navy and exceptional skills in maritime activities were to be greatly appreciated. Athens' 'very fair title to command at sea' could not have been challenged by Sparta, and this quality of Athens determined one of the

[52] Gast, *History of Greece*, I, p. 351.
[53] Armitage, *Ideological Origins*, p. 41.
[54] *Ibid.*, p. 9.
[55] Leland, *Life and Reign of Philip*, II, p. 218.

essential differences between the two empires.[56] On account of being a maritime empire, Athens secured 'a closer connection' even with the most distant colonies and was never 'averse' to expeditions far away.[57] As such, naval strength was presented by the historians as one of the requisites for connecting the motherland to its offspring and building an unmilitaristic but robust empire unlikely to dissolve easily.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the view became established in Britain that naval superiority served to foster commerce and that commerce bound the colonies more tightly than the force of arms. The power of commerce had already proven superior to that of arms and was extensively stressed by the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment. Though not peculiar to this phase of British history, a favourable interest in commerce was an important facet of the eighteenth-century imperial discourse.[58] Also, the way the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment formulated it as the motor of civilization added a new perspective to the British understanding of commerce. Commerce was 'the parent of politeness'.[59] Therefore both the quality and quantity of commerce determined the level of civilization into which modern Europe was expected to grow collectively.[60] In a similar light, as an indicator of civilization and a stimulator of refined manners, histories of Ancient Greece put particular emphasis on the unmilitaristic and commercial characteristics of the Athenian empire.

According to Gillies, the Athenians, excelling even the Romans, were the only people in history who, 'by the virtue of the mind alone, acquired an extensive dominion over men equally improved with themselves in the arts of war and government . . . an absolute authority in the islands of the Aegean, as well as in the cities of the Asiatic coast'.[61] Undoubtedly, the Athenian policy of substituting commerce for military action enabled them to enjoy a secure and peaceful hegemony over the states incorporated in the empire. Instead of martial arts, the Athenians employed the 'gentler arts of uprightness and clemency which', in Gast's words, 'alone are the security of governors, and render empire amiable'.[62]

Still, of all the historians, Stanyan was the one who most explicitly stressed this unmilitaristic aspect of the Athenians as another common point between

[56] Stanyan, *Grecian History*, I, p. 327.

[57] Gillies, *History of Ancient Greece*, I, p. 265.

[58] J. Black, 'British Foreign Policy in the Eighteenth Century: A Survey', *The Journal of British Studies*, 26 (1987), pp. 26–53, p. 45.

[59] J.G.A. Pocock, 'Cambridge Paradigms and Scotch Philosophers: A Study of the Relations between the Civic Humanist and the Civil Jurisprudential Interpretation of Eighteenth-Century Social Thought', in *Wealth and Virtue*, ed. Hont and Ignatieff, p. 241.

[60] See Hume, 'Of the Jealousy of Trade', in *Essays*, I, p. 348.

[61] Gillies, *History of Ancient Greece*, II, p. 4.

[62] Gast, *History of Greece*, I, p. 357.

ancient Athens and contemporary Britain. He was convinced that commerce flourished remarkably in Athens due to a similar environment to that of Britain. Through its virtues, the Athenian government spread 'the love of labour and husbandry', which indeed 'made way for commerce' and put the Athenians into a condition of 'being rich at home and powerful abroad'. In combination with Solon's laws of liberty, commerce at home helped 'to tame and polish a people bred up in liberty'. In imperial affairs, based on the principle of profiting mutually, it stuck the motherland and its colonies together with a glue more powerful than oppression, violence and force.[63] For this reason, above all others, Athens built up an empire inherently different from that of Sparta, which pursued imperial goals through a 'tyrannical government' that 'made use of empire only to oppress and subdue the rest of Greece'.[64]

The overt admiration felt towards the Athenian experience of empire, pervasive in the eighteenth-century histories of Ancient Greece, switched, however, to an easily detectable disenchantment when it came to the era of Pericles. It was Pericles who redefined the imperial relations of Athens with its periphery and referred to the empire, with the stronger term, *arkhê*, the exercise of the power of beginning, in his *Funeral Oration*. Because the empire at that time stretched 'from Euxine to the sea of Crete from the coasts of Asia to the Adriatic gulf',[65] the era of Pericles was commonly accepted as the golden age of Athens. Nevertheless, the reader will not come across any generous praise of Pericles by the British historians, because he undid all the pacific accomplishments of Athens and brought about the later degeneration of this once desirable model of empire. In his period, the imperial principle of non-aggression, which had distinguished Athens from Sparta, was undermined. From Pericles' rule onwards, Athens lost its previously amicable voice and became the 'dread' of its colonies. What is more, while governing the empire, Pericles put into force new regulations, in which the public benefit was no longer a priority.[66]

Obviously, his role in the Peloponnesian War, as the one who declared war, was the main reason why Pericles' imperial ventures did not receive much appreciation. Fighting a preventable war was certainly a sign of mismanagement.[67] The historians with Tory tendencies who demonstrated an anti-war attitude in their works clearly disapproved of overzealous military expeditions, which in fact meant the violation of the unofficial, unwritten imperial code of Athens.

The historians equally disdained excessive expansion. To them, throughout his reign Pericles breached not only the unofficial rule of non-aggression, but

63 Stanyan, *Grecian History*, I, p. 180.
64 Gast, *Rudiments*, p. 597.
65 Gast, *History of Greece*, I, 379.
66 *Ibid.*, pp. 379 and 377.
67 Stanyan, *Grecian History*, I, p. 329; Hind, *History of Greece*, I, pp. 413–14.

the rule of optimal expansion as well. It was he who acquired more territory than any other Athenian ruler, but his predecessor Cimon was nonetheless saluted most dearly for his efficiency, wisdom and imperial genius. This popularity of Cimon over Pericles among the British historians stemmed from Pericles' policy of overstretching the Athenian borders beyond the ideal point, making it impossible for imperial governance to be free of fearfully oppressive policies, degeneration and mismanagement.

In eighteenth-century Britain, hasty and spontaneous, hence not well-planned, territorial expansion was dismissed by the political nation as a vain and counterproductive pursuit of empire-building. This conviction was commonly expressed in contemporary political literature. At the beginning of the century, D'Avenant, for example, explained the decline of both the Spanish and Ottoman empires by the fact that they grew too fast, overstretched their boundaries and while so doing they did not have 'time to cement' the components of the empire.[68] Therefore, expansion beyond the optimum point would bring along with it maladministration, and the British who intended to learn from history ought to resist the temptation of reckless expansion. As Nancy F. Kohen maintains, the fear of 'abundance' also pervaded the imperial debate of the early 1760s.[69] This pamphlet debate reflected the anxiety about the new territorial acquisitions which brought burdensome imperial obligations and which required a change of the overseas administration.

Naturally therefore, overstretching the imperial borders was a concern also shared by the historians. Although Pericles gloriously ruled over the most extensive territory in the history of Ancient Athens, his ambition of expansion rendered it impossible to govern the empire according to the maxims established at the outset and enhanced afterwards by Cimon. As Gillies put it, what the times of Pericles should have realized was that, consequent to his reign, '[i]n the exercise of power the Athenians displayed principles totally different from those by which they had attained it'.[70] Such a deterioration was what would happen if the imperial capacity of a state were to be exceeded or, in Gast's words, if a state launched 'the mad project of attempting the empire of the world'. Unfortunately, the Athenians in the end undermined the 'general good' of their empire and 'in the name of *protectors* of Greece' acted 'in reality' as 'its *oppressors*'.[71] The British, who were the 'reluctant' imperialists of the eighteenth century, always had concerns that their empire might become overextended. Whether an ever-expanding empire could be desirable or affordable greatly preoccupied British statesmen of the time and evoked a

[68] C. D'Avenant, *An Essay upon Universal Monarchy* (London, 1701), p. 52. Also see Ferguson, *Essay*, p. 329.

[69] N.F. Kohen, *The Power of Commerce: Economy and Governance in the First British Empire* (London, 1994), p. 171.

[70] Gillies, *Grecian History*, I, p. 552. See also Montagu, *Reflections*, p. 144.

[71] Gast, *History of Greece*, II, p. 572.

substantial interest in the imperial experience of Athens, along with that of the other ancient states. Thus they sought ways to surmount the challenges of empire through, what Kohen calls, the 'collective knowledge of imperial history'.[72]

Conclusion

All in all, in a scrutiny of the historiography of Ancient Greece produced in eighteenth-century Britain and Ireland, empire comes to the fore as a theme equal in importance to that of democracy. Taking only the question of democracy into account, these texts may appear pro-Spartan, written with the purpose of denouncing the evil forces of democracy and therefore Athens. Nevertheless, ancient history-writing aimed to encompass many more parallels that could be found in hotly contested contemporary problems that required feasible solutions, and the writing of Ancient Greek history was no exception. Therefore, picking up one theme and categorizing the entire historiography in association with the investigation of that theme is not the way to proceed. Instead, we should realize that the nature of the findings will differ according to the theme chosen. I have thus attempted to argue that empire was one of the political topics that much preoccupied the historians. With reference to that question, despite discontent with the reign of Pericles, Athens did appear to be the desirable model, whereas Sparta provided only warnings. The desirable model of empire, as presented by the eighteenth-century British and Irish historians of Ancient Greece was maritime, commercial, non-expansionist and hence non-aggressive. It established bonds of mutual benefit with the colonies. This pacific attitude towards the periphery depended a great deal on honouring the correct legislative tradition at home. The historians dealt with here put particular emphasis on these topics in the conviction that genuine commitment to such principles would create the most durable empire on earth.

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[72] Kohen, *Power of Commerce*, p. 23.